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VIII

The Acadian Forest

George B. Dorr



ISSUED BY
THE WILD GARDENS OF ACADIA
BAR HARBOR, MAINE

A black and white photograph of a rocky, wooded area. A large, horizontal log lies across the foreground, partially covered by a fern. The background shows a steep, rocky bank with more trees and foliage.

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THE ACADIAN FOREST

GEORGE B. DORR

The Acadian forest, using the word Acadian in its early French sense, stretched dense and unbroken in de Monts' and Champlain's time over the wide coastal territory now occupied by eastern Maine, by Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Plundered of its wealth and existing but in fragments now, no forest of a temperate zone clothes with more vigorous growth the land it occupies, none has greater charm or shelters a wild life more interesting.

This forest is typically represented, with singular completeness, upon Mount Desert Island, where land and sea conditions meet and where a unique topography creates a correspondingly exceptional range of woodland opportunity. To establish on the Island, in connection with its now realized national park, a permanent exhibit of this forest growing under original conditions, has been from the first a constant aim with those who sought the park's creation.

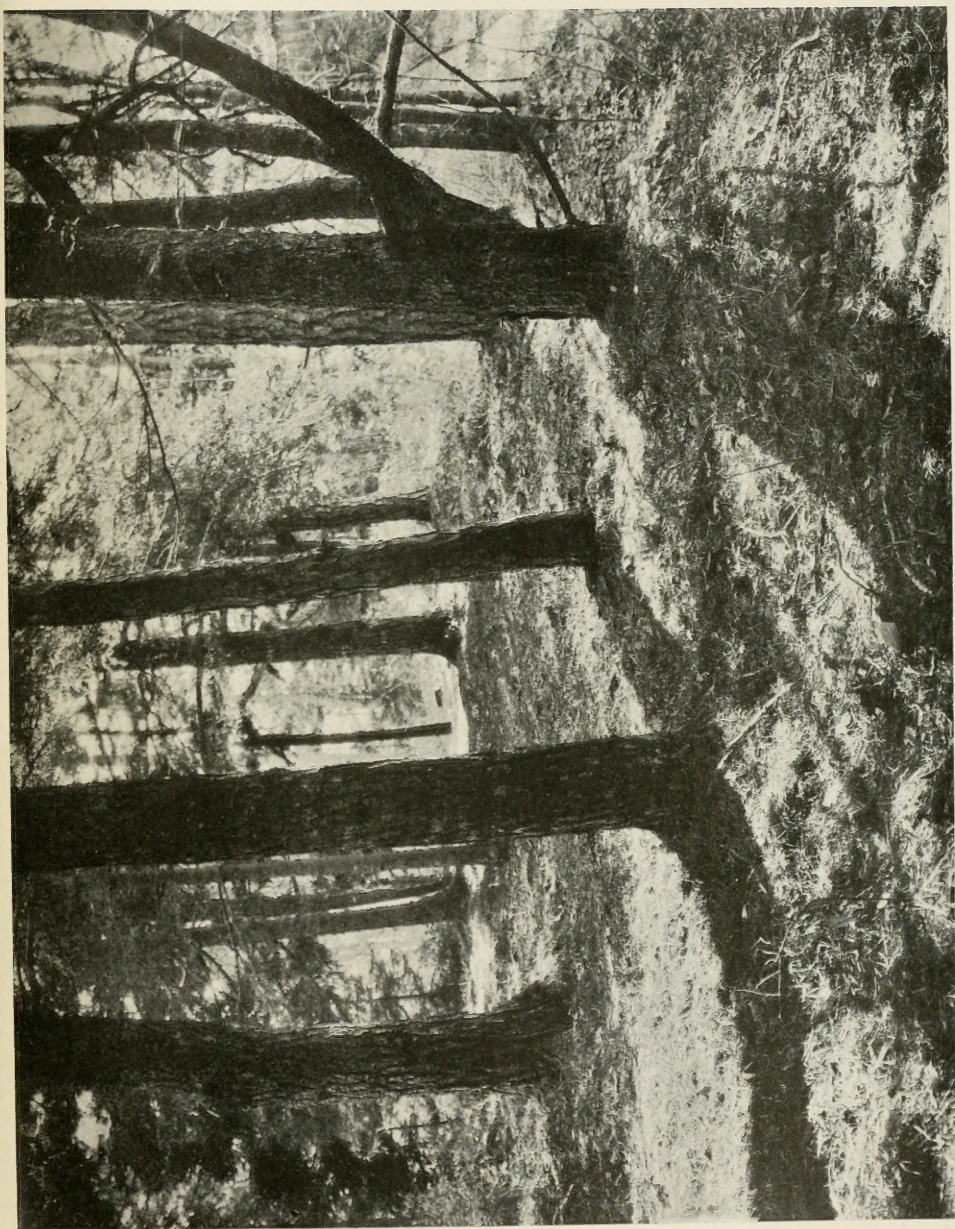
Such an exhibit has extraordinary value. A forest is far more than the mere assemblage of its trees; associated with them it contains, in regions of abundant moisture such as the Acadian, a related life, both plant and animal, of infinite variety and richness, whose home and sheltering habitat it makes. If it perish, the plants that dwell beneath its shade and draw their sustenance

in part from its decay, together with the multitudinous other life that haunts it, largely perish with it. Such a forest is a wonderful complex of mutually dependent forms, a complex anciently established which once obliterated in a region can never be restored. It passes quickly, too, destroyed by axe and fire. No forest now exists in Europe, botanists say, that shows the early, natural condition of the European woodland; its very type is matter for conjecture.

The typical trees of the Acadian forest, those that give it its peculiar character, are the northern evergreens, the cone-bearing pines and firs and spruces, the hemlocks and the arbor vitae. It is of these one thinks in picturing to oneself the region. Maine itself is called the Pine Tree State; its eastern coast, "The Land of Pointed Firs." Longfellow sets the Acadian scene for us in *Evangeline* with "This is the forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks," and far out to sea in early, long-voyaged days the approaching sailor welcomed with delight the pungent forest fragrance.

But mingled with these evergreens which give the forest its prevailing character there are abundant other trees that lend their beauty to the scene. Champlain describes the oaks growing as in a park upon one side of the Penobscot River, when he ascended it in 1604, with pine forest on the other. Deer and bears grow fat in autumn on the beechnuts in the wilder woods. The two noblest birch trees in the world, the Canoe Birch, with its pure white trunk, and the Yellow Birch, which in the North outstrips the oak itself in size, find here their native home. Ash and maple are abundant. Poplars, mingled with Paper Birches, turn into rivers of gold amongst the somber evergreens in fall, and nowhere is the autumn coloring more brilliant or of richer contrast.

Underneath the taller trees, wherever an even partial break occurs, shrubs and lesser trees spring up in wide variety; thorns and wild plum trees, beautiful in flower



A high mountain valley, wooded with hemlock, spruce, and pine, in Sietur de Monts national park

and fruit; mountain ash and elder, with red, clustered berries; viburnums that would grace the finest pleasure ground; dogwoods of northern species; sumach, beautiful at every leafy season; blueberries in the open, rocky places; wild roses by the streams and roadsides; blackberries with splendid flowering stems; witch hazel with its strange autumnal bloom; rhodora, spreading out great sheets of pink in spring upon the peaty marshlands, mingled with the fragrant labrador tea; brilliant-berried ilexes, sold in the cities at Christmas time for holly; and a host of others.

No inch of ground, in sun or shade, is left unoccupied. The very rocks are lichen-clad and ferns mat over them in shady places. Trilliums and wild orchids bloom in the forest depths, with white-flowered hobble-bushes; clintonias and the fragrant northern twin-flower that Linnaeus loved extend themselves as in wild garden beds upon the woodland floor.

Everywhere there is life, spreading mats of crowberry and the beautiful coast juniper where they are deluged by the ocean spray in winter storms; clothing wind-swept granite heights, wherever there is crack or cranny soil can gather in, with partridge-berry, blueberry, and mountain cranberry; penetrating the forest shade and profiting by the dense northern covering of leafy humus that it finds there; and rich, wherever nature has not been disturbed, in infinite variety—of mosses, fungus growths and ferns as well as flowering plants. Few forests in the world, indeed, outside the rainy tropics, clothe themselves with such abundant life, and there are none that bring one more directly into touch with nature, its wildness and its charm.

"Whilst we followed on our course, there came from the land odors incomparable for sweetness, brought with a warm wind so abundantly that all the Orient parts could not produce the like. We did stretch out our hands, as it were, to take them, so palpable were they, which I have admired a thousand time since."

MARC LESCARBOT. 1609.

Purchas translation.



Sieur de Monts Spring road, passing through a rare bit of Primeval Forest
in the national park

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